HEXHAM URBAN DISTRICT COUNCIL.

REPORT FOR 1898

Of Dr. D. JACKSON, Medical Officer of Health.

Carntyne, Hexham, Jan. 28, 1899.

Dear Sir,—I once more have the privilege through you of drawing the attention of the Hexham Urban District Council to the health statistics of their district, as measured by the death-rate. I find 190 births and 145 deaths respectively have been registered during the year. 100 of the births were males and 90 females. 66 of the deaths were males and 79 females. 190 births give a birth-rate of 31·666 per 1,000 per annum on a population of 6,000.

145 deaths is equal to a death-rate of 24 666 per 1,000 per annum on a population of 6,000. 23 of the deaths took place in the workhouse, 11 of which were from beyond your district, these being deducted from 145 leave 134 as the deaths which took place in the Hexham Urban District for the year 1898, which give a death-rate of 22·333 on a population of 6,000.

Ages at death.—36 were under one, three were one and under five, two were five and under 15, 15 were 15 and under 25, 40 were 25 and under 65, 34 were 65 and under 80, and 15 were above 80.

Causes of death.—18 were due to diseases of the nervous system, 24 to diseases of the respiratory organs, of which 11 were from consumption, 8 pneumonia or inflammation of the lungs, and 5 to bronchitis; 19 to heart disease, 16 to diarrhœa, 13 senile decay, 13 weak from birth, 3 child birth, 2 whooping cough, 2 acute rheumatism, 1 teething, 1 scarlet fever, 1 erysipelas, 1 diphtheria, 1 typhoid fever, and six inquest cases.

Cases notified.—180 cases have been notified against 201 in 1897, and 600 in 1895. Of those notified 96 were from whooping cough, 44 scarlet fever, 23 measles, 8 erysipelas, 4 small-pox, 2 puerperal fever, 2 diphtheria, and 1 enteric fever. In 1897 scarlet fever was the most prevalent disease notified, there being 171 cases; in 1895, measles was predominant, there being 447 cases.

Work done.—I learn from Mr Surtees that 1,560 yards of new sewers have been laid, 210 yards relaid, 1,007 yards of water main extension laid down, 91 new houses built and occupied, new sewage disposal works have been erected at the Tyne Green sewage outfall, and an hospital for infectious diseases has been built on an eligible site; St. Mary's Chare and Hall Stile Bank have been paved with setts, and the Priestpopple end of Fore Street with wood; three private streets have been made up and paved; seven privies have been abolished; 5 stables, 6 scalleries, 6 new shops and workshops, and 5 warehouses have been built. This shows an amount of good sanitary work done during the year, which cannot fail to have a good effect upon the health of the district in the near future. The hospital will be of great service in the event of an outbreak of infectious disease. The method of sewage disposal adopted on Tyne Green is working satisfactorily. Although not quite in full working order the effluent is much improved; the absence of sludge or refuse simplifies the working and lessens the cost without in any way impairing its effectiveness, thus abating what has been for a long time a serious nuisance.

The number of new houses built and occupied would lead one to expect a very considerable increase of population, but after the disappointment of the last census, one hesitates to adopt a hypothetical population for statistical purposes. A birth-rate of 31·5 tells against the theory of a large increase of population, it being only a little above the average of England and Wales, which was 29 7, and just equal to that of the administrative county of Northumberland, which was 31·5.

The death-rate for the administrative county of Northumberland was 16 71, for England and Wales 17·4, and for the Hexham Urban District 22 3. This needs no comment. Of the 36 deaths under one year, 20 are from Gilesgate Bank, Gilesgate, Haugh Lane, Burn Lane, and Tyne Green; 3 in Priestpopple, two of which are in Bell's Court, and 2 in Eastgate; the remainder are isolated cases, distributed over the other parts of the district.

The rate of infantile mortality in the Administrative County of Northumberland is 150·6, in England and Wales 156, in the Hexham Urban District 189·4, that is of every 1,000 children born in the districts mentioned the numbers above given die under one year of age respectively.

The deaths from consumption are not out of proportion. During the year tuberculosis or consumption has largely attracted public attention, and great stress laid upon the open air treatment of it, as something new, and reflecting upon this country as being behind alike in the knowledge of the nature and treatment of the disease. Such is not the case, the so-called open air treatment is as old as the history of medicine itself. Fresh air, sunshine, and nourishing food with enlightened climatical treatment is, and has been the basis of treatment for generations. England alone amongst the nations has made special provision for treating the poor so afflicted, in her splendid hospitals for consumption, such as Brompton and in the Isle of Wight, where the most scrupulous cleanliness and care is enforced. By means of the example set in these and similar institutions, the death-rate has been reduced 50 per cent., and the necessity for cleanliness emphasised which in a town can only be had by an effective and permanent scavenging staff. Without cleanliness you cannot have pure air, without pure air you cannot have health. Regarding the spread of consumption by milk, of which we hear so much, it is possible and probable. I have, however, seen no case that I could attribute to that cause. I have, however, seen cases due to, and others aggravated by the want of milk. Milk is now more freely used than formerly, still I consider less than it ought to be, especially by children. In large towns it is now supplied pure and sterilised, which will keep for days, by dairy companies such as the Cleveland Dairy Company in Newcastle. Great attention should be paid to the sanitary arrangements of all dairies and cow sheds, and this whether the disease is held to be hereditary as formerly, or conditionally infectious as at present. It is well, however, not to forget that the facts of one age often become the fallacies of another, and we would do well, even at the risk of being not considered up to date, not to accept as gospel that which will assuredly be modified if not upset, before another decade is past.

16 cases of diarrhœa is excessive, although they chiefly occurred in the Autumn quarter, and were mostly of children under one year of age. It points to some sanitary defect. What can that defect be? You have a good and ample supply of pure water. You have a good drainage system, labour has been abundant, and wages good, the amount of new buildings occupied has lessened overcrowding, the milk supply to the town is, I believe, good and abundant, the fish, fruit, and general edibles supplied are satisfactory. I attribute it, in a great measure, to the general want of cleanliness in the unpaved and cobble paved yards, in the more crowded tenemented part of the town, where young working people chiefly reside. To the dry season, with a peculiar warm moist atmosphere in the autumn, favouring the rapid growth of germ life, rendering the keeping of all foods difficult, especially that of children it quickly undergoing a species of fermentation which become poisonous. As milk is the natural food of children, without entering fully into the history of germ life, I may be excused if I point out that milk as it leaves the cow is absolutely pure, and that if it conveys disease to any household, the milk is not to blame, but the management of the milk, such as the cleanliness of those vessels in which it is placed, the cleanliness of those who manipulate it, the cleanliness and purity of the air where it is placed in the household until wanted for use. Germ life quickly develops in milk, especially in a warm close place. They are popularly considered and spoken of as belonging to the animal kingdom; they, however, are of vegetable origin, and are remarkable both for their minuteness, many of them are not more than one-25,000th of an inch in thickness, and for the rapidity of production in a favourable field such as milk in a warm temperative between 70 and 80 degrees; in one sample of milk so kept for 24 hours 557,500,000 were found in the 28th of an ounce, which would be about 10 or 15 drops. A large number of those germs are perfectly harmless and many are useful. In addition to milk, children are soon allowed to have some forms of beef or mutton tea or broth; these again quickly become sour and poisonous through the action of germs, under similar conditions to those mentioned above as to milk. During last summer you could have seen weekly animals killed within three feet of a large midden and hung up to set in a stable, within six or eight feet of the same midden, both stable and midden teeming with myriads of injurious germs, thus rendering the meat prejudicial to public health, especially to children. These are important factors in your infantile mortality; these causes are preventable. All the slaughter houses are unsatisfactory and unsanitary; your attention has been drawn to them by me for years.

The zymotic death-rate, excluding diarrhœa, is not excessive. In the early summer a case of small-pox occurred in Hencotes, which was somewhat advanced before your officials were made aware of it. The very prompt and energetic action taken by your Surveyor was fortunate in stamping it out, no fresh case thereafter arising from it.

I am, Sir,

Your obedient servant,

DANIEL JACKSON, M.D.,

Medical Officer of Health.

To William Prnddah, Esq.,
Clerk, &c.,
Hexham Urban District Council.